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INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

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Office of Current Intelligence

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

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Intelligence Memorandum

Subject: Current Situation in Berlin

1. The situation in Berlin is currently calm but is capable of flaring up at any time into one inimical to US security. The initiative in this matter rests entirely with the USSR. The USSR aims to make the Allied position in West Berlin untenable, preferably by measures short of war, but may be prepared to incur a strong risk of war to achieve this end. The USSR has, however, several capabilities which do not involve a serious risk of war. It uses these intermittently to harass the Allies and to convince West Berliners that their situation is hopeless unless they cast their lot with the USSR and the "German Democratic Republic" (GDR).

2. Cut off from the German Federal Republic, West Berlin is an island in the Soviet Zone, entirely dependent on trade with the West. The USSR frequently interferes with the means of transportation to the West, generally on the pretext that shipments or persons are improperly documented or that the transportation facilities are in need of repair. At present, two canal locks are closed, allegedly for repairs, and West Berlin barge traffic is partially blocked. At the same time, the USSR is refusing to approve certain interzonal trade permits unless they are accompanied by certificates showing the origin of the raw materials used in the manufacture of the goods. These measures are seriously impeding West Berlin trade. Within the city itself, the USSR pursues a policy of intermittent intimidation of the West Berlin population by personal threats and occasional kidnappings into the Soviet sector. Moreover, the vague definition of portions of the city boundary provides the USSR with opportunities to "invade" West Berlin from time to time and seize Western-controlled properties. The Allies can retaliate within Berlin only by delaying or stopping the extensive and important barge traffic on the canals in the British sector.

3. Relations between Allied and Soviet authorities in Berlin are acrimonious over the numerous points of friction between the Western and Soviet sectors, but there appears to be no likelihood of serious trouble in the near future. Moreover, a vestige of quadripartite cooperation in the city is still maintained and Soviet authorities continue to stop short of action, by either themselves or the GDR, which would destroy this facade. Re-imposition of a 1948-type blockade of the city, which would bar Allied access to West Berlin by land and water, probably would not of itself involve a serious risk of war; it would, however, certainly increase international tension to the point where risk of war from other incidents would be increased.

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An air blockade could not be effectively enforced without military action by Soviet planes and anti-aircraft weapons, and would almost certainly cause war.

4. At the present time a blockade of either type is considered unlikely. The Allies probably would retaliate by a counter-blockade of exports to the GDR which would render impossible fulfillment of the current GDR five-year plan and thus seriously impede Soviet plans for bolstering the GDR economy. Present trade controls are by no means effective. Although the Federal Government is beginning to take action to halt or at least reduce the flow of strategic goods to the GDR, controls will not be effective before the end of 1951. Moreover, since it is unlikely that the USSR would wish to restrict attendance at the large Berlin youth rally scheduled for August 1951, any type of blockade is rendered particularly unlikely until after that date.

5. Although Soviet forces are capable of initiating offensive operations without an additional build-up which might provide Allied intelligence agencies with prior warning, there is at present no intelligence to indicate that an attack by the USSR against the Allies in West Berlin is currently contemplated. The Allies have stated that they would regard such action as an attack on themselves.

6. An attack by the East German paramilitary forces (Bereitschaften) must be considered in the same context as an attack by the Red Army, rather than as an independently conceived and executed action of the GDR. Although Allied officials estimate that East German forces probably are capable of overrunning West Berlin in spite of Allied resistance, the Bereitschaften, if not supported by Soviet troops, would be unable to sustain an Allied counteroffensive from West Germany.

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